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AN EXPOSURE
OF THE
VIOLATION OF THE LETTER AND SPIRIT
OF THE
CHARTER OF THE CITY OF WASHINGTON,
BY THE
CORPORATION AND THE BANKS,
AND
THE REDRESS DUE TO THE PEOPLE.

BY A FREEHOLDER.

Congress has, under the Constitution, “exclusive” legislative power over the entire District—the people are sensible of their situation in the Confederacy, and gratefully acknowledge their obligations to Congress, and have long since given in their allegiance; but they are equally sensible, to use the words of Judge Cranch, that “the correlative duty of allegiance is protection.” When the eye roams around and sees how judiciously the public money for the Government has been expended under the respective Commissioners of the Public Buildings, and the mind contemplates the waste of the public munificence by an irresponsible body,—“a body without a soul”—to use the language of Burke—a *thing* called the Corporation of Washington—the contrast is so great, the picture so revolting, that one is ready to throw aside the pencil, were it not the *duty* for some one, in this instance, to do “every body’s business,” and make known certain prominent facts, that the peaceable remedy may be applied when a generous body shall be called upon for the extension of mischievous charters. And great must evils have become, when the example of the wicked Cromwell is deemed (figuratively) good in clearing the community of incubi, and when one of the most humble feels himself imperiously called upon to furnish a few whisks of the broom to cleanse the Metropolitan premises!

It will be recollected by several of the worthy gentlemen in either House of Congress, that in the earlier part of this nineteenth century Congress granted a Charter for the Washington City Canal Company, the avowed object of which was to accommodate the Government in the erection of its public buildings, and to benefit the entire population. Well, after the work was commenced, and hundreds fell victims to the disease generated by the exposure of swamp deposits,

the work was partially completed, indifferent bridges were placed over the canal, the people, through the manœuvrings of certain men who got into the Councils, were made to purchase the same—after the charter had been violated by neglect to complete the work and keep it in repair, as well as to furnish bridges—when the stagnant ditch was removed from the line of the Avenue, and other ground obtained for its location, running due west of the Capitol, lots were thrown into the market to reach the families of the manœuvrers ; bridges were erected at the expense of ordinary tax-payers ; and to cap the climax of the outraging of charters, the very plan of the City itself invaded by the stopping of north B street at 3d, near the residence of the unfortunate Cilly ; and the property thus illegally appropriated, and without a convention of the entire people, was cut up into lots for sale, and lo ! the slightly grogeries on the Avenues are the consequence !—and yet the followers of these real Simon Pures would regulate the deportment and the morals of the Representatives of the People of our common country ! Finally the poor people were rescued by the munificence of Congress, who paid the canal debt as due by the Corporation—and lo ! this same rotten body retains the right to tax the boatmen who bring wood to the Government and people by this same outlet, [not canal for a mile] and the bridges over the same would disgrace a country town—being both unsightly, but have actually nearly drowned thirty travelers at a time, as well as a poor widow's son—her only support, and yet turned away her petition with contumely and scorn.

Such heartless bodies evince always the most *paternal* regard for widows and orphans. For instance, they have been known to change the grades of streets, and cause gutters and pavements to be relaid, and yet send the poor paver to the adjoining property for compensation, or suffer him to go unpaid. In the case of an Administratrix, acting for minors and orphans, contrary to the law of Maryland, contrary to the charter itself, and contrary to the corporation's present usage, a lot upon which were two houses, occupied, were sold for taxes for less than two dollars, instead of the furniture, and notwithstanding the deed of the same was regularly recorded in the Clerk's Office, fees paid, yet did this blundering Corporation, through its former Collector, sell the property, and caused expenses of about eighty dollars—and yet when asked to give credit to the Administratrix for the outlay, with the exception of the legal taxes due, one of the lights of the West End, a plasterer of the name of Handy, after violating his word to a lady in not making a report "in writing," even if adverse, "got discharged from further consideration"—imitating the legislation of gentlemen of truth ! As the public could get no reasons for such cases, through the press among the proceedings, it is inferred that the *pretext* for the perpe-

tration of falsehood and injustice is, that the deceased owner did not see to the correctness of Corporation books!—and yet the Clerk of the County got his fees for recording under the Charter; and for this and the like of these wrongs, there is no remedy but the passage of a law *refusing* to extend the Charter according to its provisions. And if renewed, to make it finable in the Clerk to neglect to inform the Corporation of change of ownership in real estate.

Common sense teaches that even if it were the duty of a freeholder—which it is not—to see to the correctness of entries, as to a change of ownership of *improved* property, yet the omission could not justify a Corporation or an individual to sell illegally, and then “profit by the wrong.” Personal estate is now sold for taxes here on the premises; and in this case the houses had been occupied for a number of years! But cases of equal flagrance are without number; and Corporation officers have themselves profited by these illegal proceedings—there is a striking case on the corner of Maryland Avenue and 7th street; but the particulars will not be recited, as the gentleman himself is believed now to be thoroughly convinced of the impropriety of such sales or purchases.

But to show that wrongs are not alone perpetrated upon citizens, but upon the market people, one case of many will suffice. One Grammer, an illiterate man, Commissioner of the Market, actually instructed the market master, who did receive tax from the market people from the country for setting their baskets of produce in the open space between the two markets facing the termination of 8th street. The great degree of public execration caused this light to flee from the Council Chamber, and public expression put down the measure: it is believed that the plunder has not yet been restored. This same worthy wished to sell a lot for the City Post Office, and when he found he could not sell he was very loud against its removal to the Avenue! As Handly owns a lime-kiln on the edge of the Canal, and is thought to oppose all appropriations, even of just claims, except for the benefit of the West End—in order, perhaps, that he may get facilities from the Bank of Washington, where the Corporation makes its deposits—it is proposed to yoke the two worthies together, and exhibit them in the Capitol square, as specimens of principle, such as they are, of hard traders upon small capital!

Next we have the splendid loss by lottery, where the Corporation took care to let clear the Directors of the Scheme, although lands were given and compensation, in tickets, and money paid for their services. It was upon the trial for the recovery of prize money by a gentleman of Virginia, that Mr. Wirt stigmatized the Corporation “as a swindling Corporation;” and Dr. Blake and

Mr. McCue have the payment of their prize refused to this day, while they, in common with others, have been paying an augmented tax for the gambling transactions of this Body.

Then we find the Corporation passing a law to allow the Rail Road Company to cross the Avenue McAdamized by Congress, until we find them arrested in their career by their own Surveyor, and the Commissioner of Public Buildings, but above all by the decided action of the then President of the United States, who would not let the Company sweep around the space ["reservation"] near the Avenue and Canal, even backed by the *sympathies* of a kindred monopoly. The Old Hero, though he felt for the people when he *recommended* the payment of the City debt to save them from the clutches of the Dutch, yet he knew the Corporation too well to trust them; hence the method had to be changed, and the Corporation relinquished its "water privileges," in part, in turning over the good work of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal to the United States. And may the Government and the State of Maryland be rewarded for their generosity and wisdom in this good work, and may the latter guard well against bank charters in the coal regions, for Swartwout and his friends here have laid themselves off for monopolizing the coal lands, and of course taxing the people in a higher price of fuel than if the lands were left to be worked by individual enterprise and individual competition. Thus are the people too frequently treated for the well-meant kindness of their Representatives. Some of the press have also an interest in these speculations.

The members of the Corporation, to a great extent, are connected in various enterprises of the "public weal" to such an extent as to call their integrity as legislators into grave question. As prominent men, candor compels us to say that the Secretary of the Navy Board, and the late Librarian to Congress, are exempt from the imputation. And if three Commissioners were appointed to regulate the Police and the affairs of the six wards, perhaps better men could not be selected as Commissioner in Chief for a time, than Samuel Harrison Smith, and other kindred spirits of the Jeffersonian School, whether in the Corporation or from among the citizens, as known to the Executive.

The City debt is near \$900,000, and the expense to the people of supporting a worse than Rump Parliament, (who have discussed for months the purchase and hire of a bull, and the employ of a porter!) is about \$12,500. The tax upon property in round numbers, has been about \$50,000; the licenses for billiard rooms and low grogeries that fill the Almshouse, about \$30,000; the late assessment is enormous. Of course a considerable portion of the income, through the Bank of Washington, goes to the payment

of interest and principal, but unless the powers of mischief are taken away from the Corporation by law, (for though its charter expires in 1840, yet it contains a provision of continuation in perpetuity,) the present and future prosperity of the city will be retarded. The tyranny of this body is only equalled by its servility—not a lamp is lit by them during the recess of Congress, though those of the Government shed a blaze of light around the Capitol, fit emblem of the respective characters of the two bodies. The miserable parsimony of charging \$2000 rent to the Patent Office, driven by disaster under a roof raised in a great degree by the \$10,000 given for the accommodation of the Court, is scouted by the citizens, and even the Court is obliged to submit, and see basement rooms, for fuel, rented and paid for both by the Government and by individuals. The people say, “Let the Government take the residue of the City Hall, and finish the noble structure, and apply its apartments to various beneficial institutions.” And were it not an insult perhaps towards some of the unfortunate lunatics confined in jail, it might be suggested to use some portion of the space occupied by the Corporation idiots, voted in by groggeries, for the accommodation of men who have lost their reason by disease.

The banks here for years have ceased to be of any individual enterprise, hence so few manufactories are seen. They own much of the real estate, for balances due by builders, and cause rents to be so high, and of course living dear to the very men whose votes created them. Their charters expire next year, and if they are made to *wind up* their affairs, their condition would startle Congress. One bank, with branches, of about one half more capital than the two now possess, would suffice for the Metropolis, provided the present are made to wind up, which they will endeavor to avoid, and they will not want friends that give dinners to espouse their cause, for their own is inseparably the same—insolvent. The President of the Canal Company is loudly denounced by directors of one of them, because he has discovered certain secret springs here, and others affect to regard him for their own ulterior objects. But it may be asked, while all acknowledge the wrong, “Where is the remedy?” A Board of City Commissioners, paid by Congress, or paid by the people. The gentleman whose name has been used without leave, having been a Commissioner of Loans for the Government, could plan a proper course of getting clear of an overwhelming debt and a ridance of leeches; the citizens could elect an Intendant or Mayor at the head of the Police department, which would require the Magistrates to receive a salary, and not “buy and sell justice,” according to Tyler; the Constables or Peace Officers could then be selected as the Commissioner of Public Buildings does faithful watches of the night, and their services paid for in

like manner, and not be as a pest and a notorious nuisance; the Surveyor could be paid his fees as other Surveyors, and when employed in streets, paid as all have hitherto been paid by the Commissioner of Public Buildings, when employed on the public grounds; the Collector, Register and Clerks could receive their compensation from the Commissioners, who could levy a small tax on property as in the manner of a "levy tax," by levy. While economy is preached, we find that two clerks are required for a Corporation over a small population, and recently a member of one of the Boards resigns to get \$800 salary, being an office created during the feeble health of a former Register.

There is little or no security in the present state of things. According to Gen. Jones, one of the original Corporators, the state of the community has been most harassing. At Gadsby's he publicly declared, that if the land had been raised in height only a few feet, he would have secured a residence even on the projected site of "Jackson City," across the Potomac, rather than live under the Corporation. This is indeed strong language from acknowledged intelligence, and a gentleman whose professional character induced him to try once to wield off the blows of Wirt against the same body, and in the highest judicial tribunal. A front that could have sustained the shield of Ajax, could not save such a carcass. It was not inaptly said, when the Southrons escaped a drowning from 12th st. bridge, that the bridge itself was as rotten as the Corporation!

In the absence of a code of laws, none could be better than the collection called "Cranch's Code," and while the spirit of its framer shall animate the Bench, none could be more faithfully administered.

Should Congress establish a National Foundry in the district, the noble canal from Harper's Ferry to the Navy Yard will be particularly valuable to the Government, in its means of transportation, and if the energetic Commodore shall secure appropriations for building coast steamers and fabricating small engines, Congress will see the people's money well employed, and the star-spangled banners there float in unison with those of the Capitol.

Let Congress but estimate the thousands of dollars paid by the Government to Colman and others, for paving and grading near the public grounds, and they will be sensible of their right to regulate entirely the affairs of a city with whose welfare in their own public lots, they have so great, so overwhelming an interest. Let the members but look around and see the public grounds enclosed by these cormorants, and that, too, at the expense of the poor man's horse and the widow's cow, the rotten fences broken, and the cattle of the indigent wantonly shot! It is an ungracious and an endless task to recite all the evils inflicted by this Body upon this people. From one of the most upright and intelligent joiners down to the humblest

cart-driver, taxed to support harpies who have done nothing but for their own interests. The cry has been, "Let the charter be burnt." Whilst Congress views the care with which its Navy Yard, Arsenal, Penitentiary, and other public buildings are kept, let them take the reins into their own hands. The people at large are willing, as may be known by consulting any sober, however humble citizen. Those who are licensed to sell liquor by the small, are identified with the Corporation and assist in its support. But Congress can make it penal to sell less than a gallon, and confine its sale only to those that pay duties in the sale of groceries, or the keepers of public houses. The Corporation assists in making the thief, and Congress is put to the expense of keeping him or her in the Penitentiary! Congress, at great expense, builds a free bridge, and the Corporation fines a poor man for fastening his fishing skiff to it! Congress takes care of its own trees in a judicious manner, and finds boxes for those of the Avenue, planted at its expense, and the Corporation fines the poor countryman for hitching his horse while he seeks a physician or obtains medicine for a dying child.

The widow cannot let her geese go at large but the Corporation entertains the mighty affair in an obsolete law passed when the venerated bird of Franklin flapped his wings in the ponds along the Avenue, also the property of Congress. Writing in a rambling and careless way, merely for the throwing out of hints to the legislators of intelligence, it may be excusable in bringing in the acts of one of the retired ones of the far-famed corporation. Burch, of the House, who last summer rambled over to Europe on a frolic, on account of the omission in Congress to refer the vote of thanks to Lafayette's family, to be transmitted by the Secretary of State, in the usual manner, and where he was heralded as "Vice President of the United States!" perhaps in a state of waggery, in making out his digest of Corporation laws, once wrote "for geese," see "Police!" Now it might be said of the whole concern, see! Geese! In passing, it is conjectured Burch will charge for bearing a little box, half a foot square, containing dies, to one of the Departments, perhaps the War or the Navy, for he was once in the Corporation, and has a great love of money, and will have it if permitted. The bearing of "a dispatch," relating to ever so little, has hitherto been regarded as a compliment and advantage to a ranger, and never a subject of charge.

Small things bespeak often great principles. The Corporation actually loan out portions of the public grounds near the Canal (a continuation of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, purchased by Congress,) for wood, lumber and coal yards. Of course the consumer has to pay the augmented tax, and a brother of a former Corporation luminary, has actually piled his wood to the very edge of the wharf, and a man on horseback cannot now use a tow path. Really

the Commissioner of Public Buildings, (bridges, &c.) who gets compensation of \$3000 per annum, should be clothed with full power to see that the rights of all are respected, if a Board of Commissioners be not created to manage matters for a number of years. Gen. Washington had a board for the city in the outset, and there is safety in experience. At one time there was water sufficient for ship-building near Rock Creek, now an extended canal collects the deposits of a gneiss region, and a stone scow can scarcely get across. Look at the state of the streets near the public edifices erected !

N. B. Let a law be passed, saying, that the present charter as it is, shall not be renewed.

It may be from the shame-faced perversions of truth, which such avaricious men may make, and the interest that one press takes in Corporation delinquencies, that Congress may be induced to renew the Charter, and not consult such as Gen. Jones, who speaks ~~but~~ freely. But let them pause ere power is distributed as it now is ; not by numbers but by space of acres. To show that the grievance in this particular has not been hid under a bushel, it may be proper to append a portion of an unanswered article cut from one of the City prints, and it is hoped that there are many in Congress willing and ready to come "to the rescue !" and save the heart of the City from the tyranny, selfishness, and pillage of the extremities.

"The fact is, our bridges in the central wards afford the strongest proof of the baneful influence of such 'legislation' as comes from the extremities of this City of 'magnificent distances;' in short, the effect of combined weakness, numerically speaking, operating in the *Boards* to frustrate public opinion and public benefit, although backed by the greatest portion of the *people* of the entire City.

* * * * * This spirit of selfishness is short sighted in its origin, and fatal in its effects ; and the people are becoming more and more sensible of its deleterious consequences upon our welfare as a community. And it is to be hoped, if Congress renew the Charter of this City, the spirit of which, if not its very letter, has been so often outraged, according to the testimony of one of its original corporators, that a City within a District over which Congress has, by the Constitution, 'exclusive legislation,' will secure by that instrument the desideratum of the noble WEBSTER, 'the greatest good for the greatest number,' both as regards the welfare as well as the peace of the humblest citizen."

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